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SUBJECT: KOREA'S "AFRICA GREEN GROWTH PARTNERSHIP" RAMPS UP ENGAGEMENT WITH AFRICA

REF: SEOUL 1865 (GLOBAL KOREA)

Classified By: POL M/C JAMES L. WAYMAN. REASONS 1.4 (B/D)

Summary

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¶1. (C) The "Africa Green Growth Partnership," launched by President Lee in November, will double ROK Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa by 2012. A key facet of the initiative, which is part of a broader program to expand the ROK's development assistance programming, will be the dispatch to Africa of at least 1,000 volunteers from the Korean version of the Peace Corps. ROK officials from various ministries liken the Partnership to the ROK's New Asia Initiative; both are part of a broader Korean effort to play a more active role outside of Northeast Asia. Although African some officials remain skeptical, there appears to be a strong desire and broad-based support for more ROK-led ODA for Africa. The ROKG is eager to cooperate with the USG on aid projects in Africa and appears open to broader discussions of US-ROK collaboration on development assistance and volunteerism. End summary.

Comment

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¶2. (SBU) The ROK's outreach to Africa and Southeast Asia (reftel) is just the beginning of a substantial expansion of development assistance programming. While these initiatives are still in their nascent stages, they appear to enjoy both significant commitment from the government and support from the public. ROKG officials from MOFAT and KOICA have expressed a strong interest in ROK-USG joint programming and strategy in overseas development assistance. Given the depth and breadth of the USG's experience in this area, Korea's interest in development assistance could provide unique opportunities for U.S.-ROK collaboration. End comment.

A Surge in ODA to Africa

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¶3. (U) In late November, ROK President Lee Myung-bak hosted Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, African Union Chairperson Jean Ping, and the foreign ministers from fifteen African countries for the high-profile launch of a major new Korean aid initiative called the "Africa Green Growth Partnership." Noting that the ROK had struggled through poverty, colonization and civil war to make the transition from aid recipient to OECD member, Foreign Minister Yun pledged to boost bi-lateral ROK Official Development Aid (ODA) to Africa from USD 107.1 million to approximately USD 200 million by 2012.

¶4. (SBU) More generally, South Korea has said it would triple ODA spending to .25 percent of Gross National Income

by 2015. In November, the ROK became a member of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which consists of major aid providers who work to increase, coordinate and improve the effectiveness of aid programs. Seoul also plans to host the 2011 High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, one of the world's premier fora for discussing ODA.

¶15. (SBU) There is also an emergent emphasis on volunteerism.

The ROKG's flagship organization for overseas volunteers is Korean Overseas Volunteers (KOVs), managed by the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). In an effort to consolidate various public and private volunteer programs, President Lee in April 2009, created "World Friends Korea," an umbrella group billed as "the Korean Peace Corps." According to Deputy Director of MOFAT's Africa Division, Park Soo-deok, a key facet of the partnership with Africa will be the dispatch, by 2012, of 1,000 "World Friends Korea" volunteers. Choi Jin-hwa, KOICA Deputy Director of Development Assistance to Africa, recently informed us that to accommodate the demand from African countries, the ROK is also ramping up its human capital development programming, during the same period, by inviting roughly 5,000 trainees from African governments to participate in its human resource development and training programs, nearly quadrupling its trainees from developing countries since 2006. The volunteers, bolstered by experts from the Korean aid agency KOICA, will help build infrastructure and offer vocational training, particularly on "green" projects. Park, likened the "Africa Green Growth Partnership" to the ROK's New Asia Initiative (reftel); both, he noted, were part of a broader Korean effort to play a more active role outside of Northeast Asia.

How the ROKG Views the Africa Initiative

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¶16. (SBU) Contrasting the ROK's initiative with China's outreach to Africa, Park said the ROK has a long-term vision of "winning the hearts and minds of the African people" through "mutually beneficial projects that satisfy both Africa's need for human capital development and technology and satisfy Korea's need for natural resources." Director of the Ministry of Environment's International Affairs Division, Kim Yong-jin, elaborated that there were several environmentally-friendly projects in the pipeline:

- a water supply system in Tanzania;
- a solid waste management facility in Mozambique;
- a water supply plant in Algeria;
- a solid waste treatment facility in Angola;
- a sewage treatment plant in Libya;
- a florescent lamp recycling program in Egypt; and,
- a water supply facility project in Equatorial Guinea.

...and How Some African Diplomats Here See It

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¶17. (C) While acknowledging that Korea is an ideal assistance partner for many African countries, interlocutors from several key African embassies here told us they fear that, in the words of a Moroccan diplomat stationed at the African Union, the ROK initiative has "very little substance" and appears to be driven by a ROK desire to "keep up with the Chinese in Africa" rather than with "fostering real economic development." Others, such as Senegalese Embassy Economic Counselor Mamadou Mansourly questioned why the ROK appears to focus its green growth outreach only on African countries with significant mineral wealth and/or oil. Moreover, according to Nigerian Embassy DCM Joseph Umoru, the Korean "Partnership" also fails to address the ROK's informal used-goods trade, which he claimed is crippling local manufacturing sectors in countries like Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana. Despite the criticisms, the large majority of African

leaders at the forum appeared to welcome ROK ODA to Africa and their new green growth initiatives.

ROKG Eager to Collaborate with the USG

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¶8. (SBU) Interlocutors from MOFAT and the Ministry of Environment stressed to us that the ROKG is eager to cooperate with the USG on aid projects in Africa. For example, in a recent meeting with Embassy Seoul's Agriculture Counselor, the ROK's Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries called for joint ROK-USG agricultural development projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Beyond Africa, Korean government officials have seemed receptive to collaboration in development assistance in other regions and sectors as well. KOICA officials have also requested insight into preferred practices and programming from USAID.

STEPHENS